
Counting the Catalogs (#4)

Philosophy and Pragmatism

Paul Mistretta (LM-111); thought provoking input by Jack Brandt (LM-14) and Bob Schwerdt (#505L)

Editor's note: Despite the concerns reflected below, this discussion is not intended as a criticism of many of the catalogs discussed. International cataloging efforts have and continue to generate truly impressive results! There will always be inconsistencies between catalogs. Just as in any other art form, the artists who generate these works have (and must have) tremendous discretion as to the form and content of the final catalog.

Beginning in the March Bulletin, I have been publishing the results of my effort to count the catalogs which enumerate the perfins of the world. In my introduction to the second installment of the count, I appealed for help with several areas for which I had been unable either to find a catalog or to extract information from the catalogs I did find.

Both Bob Schwerdt and Jack Brandt have been extremely helpful in clarifying (and even giving references and counts for) some of my problem areas. While I have compiled these new counts and reference materials, my intent is to publish this material after completion of the original A-Z listing – so don't look for it alphabetically. (This is a pragmatic choice, or maybe simple laziness. My file is an EXCEL spreadsheet and I formatted and printed the original list – and don't want to redo the later parts as new information comes to light.)

First – an error spotted by Bob was corrected by Jack as follows. In the March count Cocos and Cochin counts are reversed. Cochin should be the 15 + 1 and Cocos simply the 1. I will show this change in the final listing of areas that were problematic – but the good news is that it doesn't affect the total counts – only the two involved country counts.

A letter from Jack forced me to do some serious thinking about what I have counted and what it all means. The first point made in his letter to me was: “Catalogs are very inconsistent, regarding revenues, others, regionals, SPECIMEN, locals, changes in political status, and most everything else.”) To which I respond simply - Amen!

This point caused me some concern at the outset – but then I pragmatically rationalized the problem away. *I was counting the catalogs – as they were published.* I was not attempting to develop new information. In catalogs like the Canada and Great Britain catalogs I used, no general distinction is made between postal and revenue use, so I counted the patterns as POST. Future cataloging efforts (like the ongoing 4th ed of the Canada catalog) are expected to separate/clarify this information. But, barring specific information in the catalog, I put the count under postage and used a zero for revenue.

This question led immediately to another by Jack, which I had also answered for myself purely by the way the counting was done. His question: “...is this count a country-perfin type or a country-stamp-type-perfin type...’ list?

Without trying to be flip – the answer to that question is “yes”. The listing is both at the same time, based purely on what was available in the various catalogs. My initial attempt was to produce a ‘country/stamp type/perfin type count. If clear revenue information was recorded such as in the India catalog, I counted it separately – without any attempt to cross-reference the patterns and eliminate possible duplication with post types. As for the catalogs like those already mentioned for Canada and Great Britain, only a ‘country/perfin type count was possible from cataloged information.

Compounding this problem are catalogs such as the Ancoper catalog of French perfins. Under its discussion at “8.10 Fiscal Stamps” is found the statement: “Some of those firms are known only on fiscal stamps.” However no note is made by pattern of those patterns that ONLY occur on fiscals. I believe that the French fiscal count is correct based on the catalog (and my ability to keep numbers straight), but the POST numbers may be slightly inflated by those unidentified patterns found only on fiscals. As an example CL206 and C*N306 are marked “*fiscal*”, but are in my collection on postage stamps. In the catalog there is no ‘*postal*’ notation to distinguish them from the stamps noted at 8.10 of the authors notes.

And one other problem (challenge?) rears its ugly head here. In the US catalog we have a consistent publisher (The Perfins Club) and, as a result, fairly good tracks for inclusion, deletion, and renumbering (moving) of patterns from one catalog version to the next. This documentation reached new heights in Randall’s recent update of this catalog, where any pattern that was moved, removed or whose catalog number was changed for whatever reason is noted in the appendix to the section where it was located in the previous (Balough & Balough) U.S. catalog.

Unfortunately, this tracking between catalogs is often not done and confusion can result. Similar clear tracks (though , handled in parentheses under the current catalog number) are to be found in the Belgian perfins catalog by Hammink and Vander Hoorn . However, has anyone tried to reconcile the inclusions/exclusions and numbering in the three recent Italian catalogs? When this problem occurred – *I simply picked one catalog and counted it; frankly, I ignored the others.*

With respect to the separation of various political units within a single boundary – either over time or by geography – catalogs are also very inconsistent. And they are also inconsistent with respect to their treatment of dies on a multi-head perforator versus distinct patterns created by different machines.

Thus Jack observes that the Australian catalog presents a good start. He cites his collection wherein he finds five or more different dies where only a single pattern is recorded. He goes on to state: “I

have not counted the various state issues, which are listed in the box under the illustrations.”

I have counted these “A”, “N”, “Q”, etc. listings and find that they *are* clear. The inclusion of the “A” for the Australian commonwealth clearly distinguishes the states and the commonwealth issues. What is missing, however, is any clarity as to the use of the patterns on Revenues versus postal issues. All State and commonwealth issues have zero revenues – which may be accurate or not. I do not know for sure.

With respect to punches (spades, diamonds, large and small circles, etc.) there is no consistency among catalogs. While many mention and include sample punches, I am unaware of any catalogs that have fully listed these items. Chuck Spaulding’s efforts along this line are apparently unique to the present.

Jack also mentions the difficulty of regional issues - to which I add occupation issues, ‘used abroad’, and similar quagmires. Frankly, I picked names that appeared consistent with Scott’s cataloging. In some cases I suspect I further confused things rather than clarifying them. Regionals and locals are pretty straightforward, occupation and used abroad are not. So expect that these political/geographical units are my best guess. I have tried to insert cross-reference lines with zero counts where I made naming decisions of this type.

Both Bob and Jack made one point clearly. *There are some of these units that are not yet formally cataloged.* Information appears only in the form of articles in society bulletins, other places in the philatelic press, or as a worksheets in society files. With the help of both, many of these less available sources have been identified.

With respect to hard-and-fast rules to follow, I’m afraid that there are almost none. As any catalog editor will admit, hard-and-fast is for science not cataloging which is an art. Each sets guidelines for inclusion and description – and they are not always consistent with the efforts of others. So, the rest of us sometimes have trouble reconciling the contents. That’s the fun of the hobby! Hopefully this note helps clarify where the numbers I am publishing come from.